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The Black Cat

1899

OCTOBER

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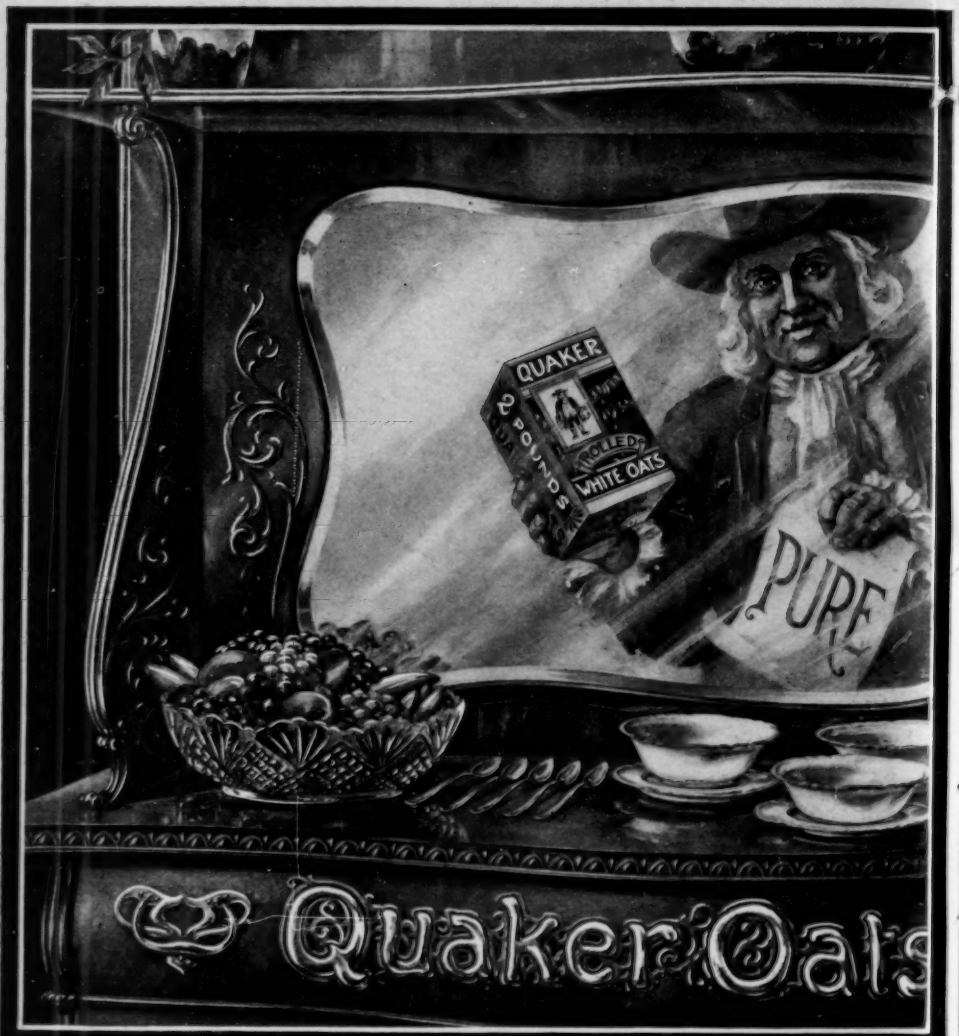

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The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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No. 49. OCTOBER, 1899. 5 cents a copy. 50 cents a year.

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

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Gabriel Dare's Last Trip.*

BY BERT LESTON TAYLOR.

UP in the Maine woodland, in the evening shadow of Mount Kineo, I have a cabin. It is a roomy affair, so thick-walled and deep-thatched that winter's keenest blast has turned its edge upon it, and five years have slipped away since the wet spring day I kindled a blaze in the rough stone fireplace, and drew a long, deep breath of freedom from the madding crowd. At that time I had failed in business and in matrimony — seemingly I was no fitter for the one than for the other — and so complete was my failure, so hopeless of repair, that I bore my ill-luck in the spirit that is known as philosophical, and sought the solitude that Kineo's evening shadow falls upon.

Concerning myself, that is enough and to spare: Mr. Edward Atherton waits to take the stage.

Toward sundown of a late September day, as I sat, cleaning a rifle, beside my cabin door, a rustling in the bushes caught my ear, and, as my visitors are for the most part four-footed, I reached for a cartridge. This time it proved to be one of the guests at the Kineo House, who seldom stray in my direction. He came up the

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trail leisurely, spoke me a good-day, and sat him upon a log. I am not one that can glance at a man like a camera; so all I noted, as I ran my eye over him, was an agreeable countenance and a taste in dress. There was some talk of the weather; and then:

"I have a great ambition to shoot a moose," said my visitor.

I hunted an imaginary speck within the rifle-barrel. "Why," said I, "fifty men with a like ambition have passed through here since the season opened — and the season is yet young."

"True," said he, nodding, "but few of them will go deep in the woods. Now *I* should like to go clear to the Canadian line. I understand the Allagash country is full of moose."

"Well," said I, "I fancy you would find less moose than pine cones; though one is almost sure to get a shot or two if he paddle down the Allagash to the St. John."

"Will you lead me into that land of promise?" asked Atherton; and after some parley we struck a bargain. The best of the guides at Greenville had been long since engaged, and those that remained were not over-reliable. Although I do not advertise myself as guide, there are certain New York parties that now and then engage my services. It is the only business I have been successful in.

We arranged to depart the morning following; and promptly at the hour appointed my patron presented himself, to put my gravity to a severe test. Plainly, here was a tenderfoot of purest ray serene.

He was clad in a new and natty suit of gray corduroy, wore on his legs new and gorgeous yellow hunting-boots, and on his head a helmet of spotless white; and one could scarcely pack in two canoes the impedimenta that he spread before me, ranging in superfluity from a small camera to a huge birch-bark moose-horn. I prevailed upon him to leave the larger part of his outfit in my cabin, but he insisted on the moose-horn, which, with the radiant yellow hunting-boots, formed a combination that upset my seriousness every time I set my eyes on it.

I shall disregard the details of our voyage to the Allagash, for 'tis a well-splashed track, lying, as many know, through Moosehead Lake, across a carry to the west branch of the Penobscot, down that stream to Chesuncook Lake, and thence, by Umbazookskus, a second carry, and Mud Pond, to Chamberlain Lake. Fine weather favored us, and we loitered on the road.

For a tenderfoot, Atherton proved uncommonly helpful, afloat and ashore. He swung an ax well, and he was a capital hand at the paddle — indeed, he paddled better than I — and when I said as much, he answered that an Indian had taught him. But the tenderfoot in him cropped out every evening, when, supper eaten and dishes washed, he sat by the camp-fire, with his back against a tree, and disturbed the solitude with the dismal notes of his moose-horn. Sometimes, to encourage him, I would imitate the call of the moose; patiently he would strive to reproduce it from his birch-bark contrivance. Then, truly, I was in a "howling wilderness."

We saw no game till Churchill Lake was reached. Whilst crossing an arm of this I discovered a deer in the water; but when I warned Atherton, who was reclining on the floor of the canoe, he returned lazily: "Shoot away, my son. *I'm* after moose." And this surprised me not a little, as I had rather expected him to spring up and upset the canoe.

As I put down my paddle the game was some dozen yards from the shore. It is mere butchery to shoot a deer in the water; so I waited until this one had gained a little stretch of sand.

"Don't miss him," said Atherton. "I'm getting tired of fish and bacon."

The range was no more than a hundred yards, but the deer leaped for the timber at the instant that I fired. "Missed!" I cried, somewhat chagrined; and as I spoke a second shot rang out, just as the target bounded into the brush. I turned to see Atherton's rifle smoking.

"You must have winged him," said he.

"I think not," said I; but when we went ashore we found a dead deer.

"I thought so," said Atherton, with a quiet chuckle. This led me to cut the bullet from the carcass, and I found, as I suspected, that it had come from Atherton's rifle, which was of smaller caliber than mine.

We encamped that noon where the deer had fallen; and after dinner Atherton amused himself with revolver practice, throwing a tin plate into the air and boring holes in it.

"You're pretty handy with a gun," said I.

"I learned that from a cowboy," was his reply.

"Decidedly," I thought, "I have never piloted a more promising tenderfoot." And I well-nigh forgave him the moose-horn and the yellow hunting-boots.

Near the outlet of Round Lake, where the lily-pads are plenty, Atherton got his moose. It was a long shot and a quick shot, but it served.

"Are you content?" said I, "or shall we go farther?"

"I've got all the moose I want," said he; but I should like to see the country. Let us go on."

I dressed the head of the moose — a fine specimen — and, hiding it in the bushes against our return, we put forth once more upon the Allagash. At Atherton's suggestion I surrendered the paddle, and thereafter we made slow progress; for he paddled little more than was needed to hold steerage-way. At the rate he was moving it would take him the better part of a year to gratify his desire "to see the country." My companion, too, had fallen silent, and I no less so; five years of solitude have deepened a natural reticence; thus several hours passed without further speech than a request for the passing of flask or tobacco.

All the afternoon we drifted, and the sun drooped behind the green wall of the stream. Suddenly Atherton drove his paddle into the mud at the mouth of a tributary that comes in from the west.

"How distant is the St. John?" he asked.

"A day's drift," said I. He smiled.

"How far in miles?"

"Eight or ten."

"What do you call this creek?"

"Sandy Brook."

"Um!" said he. "Let us explore it."

He shot the canoe into the weeds and brush that partly screen the tributary; and, putting these aside, we began an exploration that impressed me as no more than an odd whim.

Even at its mouth Sandy Brook is scarcely twenty feet across. Atherton paddled along the south bank a matter of two hundred yards, scanning the shore the while, until navigation ceased with a sandbar; then he set out to return by the south bank, but he had

not proceeded far before he swung the bow of the canoe upon a bit of beach.

"We are not the first to make a landing here," said he; and indeed, as I looked about, I remarked many bootprints in the soft soil. We stepped ashore and stretched ourselves.

"Wonder where that trail runs to?" said Atherton, pointing to a small opening in the forest. "Any settlement around here?"

I shook my head. "Probably a lumber trail," said I.

"Very likely," said he; "but let us look into it."

We took our rifles and entered the wood, and presently found the path pitch up at a sharp angle. Atherton drew my attention to an object lying at our left hand — it was a barrel set in a spring, with a bit of canvas for a cover.

Five minutes of walking brought us to a considerable clearing, on the farther side of which stood a log house, with a small barn and outbuildings hard by. Smoke was curling from the cabin chimney, and in the barnyard stood a brace of cows.

"And yet, Wyman," said Atherton, as he led the way toward the cabin, "you declared there was no settlement around here. But perhaps," he added, with a smile, "you do not esteem one farm a settlement."

"I had no motion that one farm existed here," said I; "and I am somewhat familiar with the country."

"Yet behold the cows," said he; "and that means milk for our sundown coffee."

Our conversation was cut short by the appearance of a woman at the cabin door. Atherton doffed his helmet.

"Good afternoon, Miss," said he; and I noted she was young, and good-looking withal. Her sleeves were rolled up to the elbow, and to a pair of shapely arms clung particles of butter. It was not, however, her pretty face and rounded arms that first caught my attention, but the startled look she threw upon us, and the sudden paling of her cheeks. Strangers in that neighborhood were doubtless rare as angels' visits; and if she were alone, her maiden fright was natural.

She dismissed *me* with a glance; but she never took her eyes off Atherton whilst he explained, in effect, that we were sportsmen who had blundered into her domain, and that if she could

spare us a little milk for our coffee we should invoke a blessing on her pretty head.

"Will yer come in?" she offered.

"Thank you, we shall do very well here," said Atherton, taking a seat on the bench under the window. The young woman fetched me a stool, and herself sat just within the doorway.

The cabin stood upon a little rise of ground, facing the trail up which we had come. It was rudely constructed; but rough as was the exterior, it was scarcely less inviting than within. This was not the fault of the mistress of the cot; the single room she had the care of was at least well-scrubbed. But this room was as crowded as the pictures of some injudicious artists. Overhead, boards laid across the rafters were piled with clothing, kitchen utensils, guns, fish-rods and rubbish. Two beds stood in diagonal corners, one of them, presumably the young woman's, curtained with a few yards of print. In a third corner was an antiquated cookstove, and in the fourth a bench for a table; while for seats there were two boxes and a stool. It was a cheerless interior, the farther corners but ill lighted by the single door and the small, port-like windows.

There was some talking whilst the twilight drew on, Atherton providing the most of it. It took the form of pleasant questioning on his part, and short, timid answers from the young woman. I am sure with such a backward witness I should learn but little; but Atherton drew out that she was housekeeper for her father, Nick Josselyn, who had gone to some camps on Allagash Lake, and would not return for several days; that her mother was dead, and that her name was Nellie — with, I have no doubt, a miscellany of other facts that I did not stay to learn; for as the young woman had not glanced twice at me since our arrival, I took myself off with the remark that I would fetch our provender, if Miss Nellie would lend us her stove for a camp-fire.

"It's the yellow hunting-boots," I ruminated, as I sat in the canoe and burnt a pipeful of tobacco. "I shall never laugh at them again."

But there was more to Atherton than yellow hunting-boots, white helmet and natty corduroy. He was a well-set-up, graceful chap, with a soft brown eye to play the mischief with impression-

able young women; an eye, likewise, to "threaten and command," unless I read it wrongly. The idea, however, that my patron would stoop to a flirtation with Nick Josselyn's daughter was, to my mind, quite absurd; although there was the excuse that she was pretty, and had shapely, dimpled arms.

When I returned to the cabin the lamp was lit and the kettle singing, and our hostess was preparing supper. A good supper, too, it proved, and Atherton drew comparison betwixt my cooking and Miss Nellie's.

After the customary pipe and a shorter chat than usual, my patron and I repaired to the barn, to make our bunks on some hay. Without women or business to brood on, I meet sleep half-way — within five minutes I was well along toward dreamland, lulled by the pleasant clatter of Miss Nellie over dishes.

I was awakened by a sharper sound. Someone swore softly in the darkness of the barn; then I heard the door slide open and shut again. I reached my hand over to touch Atherton, but found only a depression in the hay.

There was a window at my elbow, and out of this I thrust my head. The light still burned in the cabin, and though I got but a half-view of the doorway — the barn lying to one side — I saw a form pass the threshold. Not two minutes afterward the light in the cabin was extinguished, and, there being no moon, the clearing was in pitchy darkness.

So my patron was not above a vulgar trysting, I thought, contemptuously; and I was about to draw in my head when a match flared in the darkness, and by its small light I saw two forms without the cabin; then the glow of a cigar was the only bright point on what is known in poetry as night's curtain.

The light breeze brought the sound but not the substance of a low-voiced colloquy; and this time, strange to say, the most of it was furnished by Miss Nellie. I caught but two words, at the end of a quarter-hour: "Good night." They were Atherton's; and as he returned to the barn the light reappeared in the cabin.

I rose early, but Atherton was before me. He had gone down to the river, Miss Nellie informed me; and proceeding thither, I found him engaged in stowing the canoe among some bushes.

"You are not for setting out this morning?" said I.

"No," said he; and after a pause, "Wyman, you are a prince of guides, and a charming companion; but, Wyman, your cooking is something awful."

"I am quite of your opinion," said I, to lead him on; for I read jesting in his eyes.

"Now," he went on, "Miss Nellie, on the other hand, is another Mrs. Rorer. Her pies are just the sort that 'mother used to make'; and for dinner, think of it! she promises a raspberry dumpling. Just one more day, Wyman, before I resign myself to your dismal fish and bacon."

"You forget the moosemeat," said I.

"I wish I could," he sighed. "I don't like it."

The forenoon was yet young when Gabriel Dare made his appearance. He broke into the clearing at a smart pace; but when he saw me by the cabin he checked himself, and came up slowly. As he drew nearer he recognized me, and quickened his pace again.

"What yer doin' here?" was his first question, as he shook hands.

"Piloting a Boston sport," said I. Dare looked quickly around.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"Strolled off into the timber back of the barn a spell ago," said I.

"He's better not stroll too fur," said Dare. "If he gets inter that cedar swamp you'll hev ter notify his relations." He thrust his head inside the cabin and glanced about. "Where's the gal?" he asked.

I answered that I had not seen her for an hour or more; and Dare took a seat on the bench, to smoke a pipe and fire questions at me between puffs.

During the five years that I had roamed the north woods I knew Gabriel Dare as hunter, trapper and guide. I had met him as far north as Connor's, where he called it he had a home, and as far south as Enfield, on the Penobscot. A likeable young fellow was Dare, physically good to look at, frank of speech, and pleasant-tempered. His father, he had some time told me, was a Yankee, his mother a Frenchwoman of Quebec. Our acquaintance was but skin-deep — a hail and farewell as we passed each other on lake or stream.

Dare discovered an uncommon interest in my "Boston tenderfoot," as I described Atherton to him, and he asked me a dozen questions concerning my patron; all of which I was able to answer frankly, save how we came to be at Nick Josselyn's cabin; and this I passed over with the explanation that we had been hunting a camp, and had stumbled upon the clearing quite by accident.

"Wal," said Dare, when he had made an end of his questioning, "you'd better hunt up yer tenderfoot. Thet cedar swamp's a nasty place."

The hint was too broad to be overlooked — Dare desired the clearing to himself — and, as it was all one to me, I let him have it.

I found the cedar swamp a nasty place, indeed — a man untaught in woodcraft might forever lose himself within its dismal labyrinth — but I had no notion that Atherton was astray. I followed the skirts of the swamp to Sandy Brook, and here I came upon, not Atherton, but Miss Nellie. She was lying on a little knoll, with her head buried in her arms. At my approach she sprang up, and showed me a pale and frightened face.

"Has Gabe come?" she asked, eagerly yet fearfully.

"Yes," said I.

"And the guv'ment man —?"

The secret was out, in part at least; and I turned away, angry with her and angry with Atherton. A man does not like to be deceived, though there may be good reason for the feigning; and in the first flash of my resentment I was minded to put Dare upon his guard.

But the opportunity did not come. When I reached the cabin the two men were sitting on the bench before it, conversing amicably. The talk was of paddling, and Atherton exposed, for Dare's inspection, a pair of soft, white hands.

"I can paddle all day without getting tired," said he, "but as I don't keep in practice, it blisters my hands."

The other laughed, and held up two enormous fists, brown as a nut and tough as leather.

"Them's the kind er hands to paddle with," said he.

"And yet," said Atherton, "my wrist is strong as yours.

You don't believe it? Try to twist it." He thrust forth his left hand, whilst his right slipped into his coat-pocket. "Take both hands," said he, as Dare seized the extended wrist.

I could not see how the trick was done, but I heard the snap of the handcuffs.

Dare for a space seemed not to comprehend what had occurred — then he leaped to his feet, his face twitching with passion.

"Damn you!" he roared, and made as if to throw himself upon Atherton, who rose, flung open the cabin door, and motioned his prisoner within.

And then a strange change came over Dare. Eyes that had fairly flashed fire grew dull; trunk and limbs that had stood like those of a pine tree, trembled; and a head that had been lifted like a lion's in defiance, sank slowly upon his breast. With downcast eyes he passed the door, which was padlocked behind him.

"Wyman," said Atherton, "will you oblige me by keeping watch over that chap while I go down to the river?"

"Thank you, I'm not in that business," said I, turning on my heel. He followed, and laid a hand on my shoulder.

"The most unpleasant feature of my calling," said he, "is that I cannot admit my best friend to my confidence. You must see that, Wyman. Therefore I do not ask you to do guard duty — I command you. You know," he added, with a smile, "the law clothes me in that authority." And without waiting for the disagreeable answer I had ready, he walked away toward the river.

I turned to see the prisoner's gloomy face at one of the ports that served for windows.

"By God! Dare," I cried, in vexation, "I have a great mind to turn you loose."

"No," said he; "don't git yerself inter trouble on my account. I'll take my medicine. When the gal comes, tell her I want ter see her."

I smothered my reply. Poor Dare! His medicine was to be more bitter than he thought.

During the ensuing quarter-hour my resentment cooled considerably; but it flared up afresh when I caught sight of Miss Nellie coming around a corner of the barn. I crossed to her.

"Gabe wants to see you," said I.

"Oh, no, no!" said she, in a choked voice, and shrank back in dismay.

"You must," I insisted; and taking her gently by the arm, I drew her to the cabin, passed her in, and secured the door with a feeling of satisfaction. Betrayer and betrayed were face to face.

"Wal, they ketched me at last, Nell," said Dare. Every word spoken in the cabin was audible to me. "And it sarves me right, I reckon. I shouldn't a-went agin forebodin's. I'd a feelin' that suthin'd happen this trip. But I needed a few more dollars. The little house at St. Modeste was nigh ready fer yer, Nellie."

"Gabe!"

It was a piteous cry, and I felt sorry for the girl; for I realized vaguely that she, vaguely too, had grasped some part of the truth, and that the burden of her miserable mistake would be hard for her to bear. I knew now why the fire had died out of Dare's eyes when he confronted Atherton. He was thinking not of himself, but of his sweetheart; not of the prison that awaited him, but of the little cottage at St. Modeste.

"Some-un hez given me away," went on Dare, in the same mild voice. "I reckon I know who. I broke his jaw for him a month ago. There, there, little one, don't take on so." The girl was sobbing violently. "I don't know how long the guv'ment'll want me — p'r'aps not more'n a year. The little house'll wait fer us, Nell."

Every sentence must have been a stab. In imagination I could see the poor creature wince.

"Oh, Gabe!" she wailed at last, in a flood of tears, "it ain't true, then — you ain't disgraced me — you ain't a-goin' ter marry Mary Beaumier? Jim Hunter said ——"

Dare roared out an imprecation, and dashed his manacled fists upon the table. The lion was awake again.

"Damn thet lyin' Hunter!" he cried. "I wish I'd a-killed him!"

"No!" almost screamed the girl. "Kill *me*, Gabe! I done it! I done it! I told the deputy at Connor's, and he sent fer ther guv'ment man. Kill *me*, Gabe! I ain't fit ter live!"

I walked to a window and looked in. Dare sat at one end of the table, with his arms upon it. The girl had flung herself at his

feet, and was sobbing and grovelling in a heartbreaking way. But all my sympathy was for Dare, and I was rather glad that the duskiness of the cabin interior kept his face from me. I felt sorry, too, in another fashion, for Jim Hunter, whoever he might be. There was a sad day of reckoning ahead for him, I was certain.

A thin cloud of tobacco smoke floated past my face. I turned to see Atherton at my elbow.

At last Dare spoke; and I was angry with him (I was in an ill humor that day) because his voice was so gentle.

"There, there, little one, don't take on so," he said a second time; and with his fettered hands he sought to raise the girl from her abject position. "It's hard, comin' from you; but it wuz a mistake, and Jim Hunter'll pay fer it, blast him! There, there, I fergive yer. Don't cry any more."

His charity and forgiveness served but to draw out a fresh burst of tears and self-reproaches.

"Love yer, Nell," he interrupted, catching at a thread of her lamenting, "why, I love yer better'n my freedom, an' God knows I loved that. Love yer, little one? If it 'ud make yer a mite happier I'd rot in jail."

Gradually the storm went down, and hope arose.

"Gabe!" exclaimed the girl suddenly, "p'r'aps the guv'ment man'll let yer go!"

Dare laughed, unmirthfully. "Yer don't know them chaps, Nell," said he. "I do. They ain't got any heart. They *can't* hev' in their business. I don't blame 'em a mite."

I glanced around at Atherton. He was smoking unconcernedly. Dare was right.

"But," persisted the girl, eagerly, "if yer promise ter leave the country, an' not come over the line again ——"

"He'd laugh at me," said Dare.

"Mr. Wyman," said Atherton, "I will relieve you of your unpleasant duty. Will you kindly take the rifles and things down to the river? You may put my traps in Dare's canoe, if you wish. I shall be glad of your company on the way back; but if you are implacable we will part company at the water's edge."

I held out my hand. "I am at your service until discharged," said I. "I was foolish to take offence."

"Thank you," said he; and shouldering our effects, I jogged down to the stream.

I packed our outfit in *my* canoe, and was loading my pipe when Atherton joined me.

"You will have to make room for these," said he, uncovering two butter-tubs in Dare's canoe.

"What is it?" I asked. "Opium?"

"Miss Nellie's butter — about three inches on top."

"And underneath?"

"Phenacetine. There must be four or five hundred dollars' worth in each tub."

"By thunder!" I exclaimed, suddenly. "Where's your prisoner?"

"Got away," said Atherton, coolly, bending over one of the tubs. "As I was taking him out he tripped me up, and broke for the timber. No use following him."

"You don't appear to be much concerned," said I.

"Well, I am," said he, but his voice belied the words. "He's the first man that ever got away from me. But I've got the stuff, and Gabriel Dare has made his last trip, I promise you. He was only a small fish in the smuggling stream, anyway. There's a bigger one down Bangor way. I promise, you, too, that *that* fish won't get away."

I held my tongue, and prepared our embarkation.

Presently the bushes rustled, and Miss Nellie came tripping down the trail; and, for the first time in our brief acquaintance, I read happiness in her face. She went straight to Atherton, threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him; then she flew away again, as silently as she had come. We took our seats in the canoe.

"Poor girl!" said Atherton, softly. "Her troubles have turned her head."

"Um!" said I; and with a thrust of the paddle I sent the canoe out into the stream.

Old Sinclair's Story.*

BY FRANK BRANDRAM.

T had been the affair of young Wilkes that had taken me to the club that evening. When I met him, wandering aimlessly about in a half-frozen condition, I knew that there was something unusual on his mind, and, as I was his chosen confidant, counsellor and confessor on all occasions, I simply dragged him to the club smoking-room, determined that he should unbosom himself.

"Now, Wilbur," I said, when the waiter had brought us something designed to thaw out the iciness, both physical and mental, in which Wilkes seemed bound, "go ahead and tell me all about it."

"Sh!" said Wilkes, "we are not alone."

"Nonsense!" I exclaimed, yet speaking in a low voice, "It's only poor old Sinclair! He doesn't count anyway."

"Old" Sinclair was a gentleman called old by reason of obvious, indisputable and respectable age. He was known certainly to have been a member of the club for over forty years, and it was often said that he never failed to put in a nightly appearance there during those four decades. He always occupied the same seat in the smoking-room — though he never smoked — nor did he ever drink or become intimate with any of the members.

He was certainly not a deaf mute nor an imbecile, for, on rare occasions, he had been known to converse with intelligence and spirit on the topics of the day. But usually he sat there and said nothing. He sat there and, apparently, heard nothing. He sat there and, to all appearances, *thought* nothing.

Wilbur's trouble proved to be a really very unnecessary misunderstanding with a young lady, with whom I happened to be acquainted, and my opinion, therefore, was quickly formed and my advice promptly given:

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"Go to her at once, my boy, and explain to her as you have to me!"

With an expression of thankfulness and relief Wilbur lighted his cigar, and we were leaning back to enjoy the luxury of our shelter from the storm without, when the silence was suddenly broken by an unexpected voice:

"Gentlemen."

It was spoken sharply, but in a high-bred tone, and came from "Old" Sinclair, the only occupant of the room besides ourselves.

"Gentlemen!" he repeated, as we turned in our seats, "I trust you will not think me capable of eavesdropping, but I really could not help overhearing your conversation, without moving away."

The look of senile oblivion had vanished from the old gentleman's face. He seemed bright, alert, and agitated by some deep emotion.

"Certainly, Mr. Sinclair," I replied, "pray do not apologize."

"I heard the story of Mr. Wilkes, and your reply, and I wish to Heaven I had had such a friend, to give me the same advice!"

We started slightly at the disclosure that this seemingly unobservant old man knew even our names, and at the vehemence of his words.

"Pray allow me to explain," he said, with the air and manner of a Grandison: "I hope I shall not bore you with my little story, but the case of Mr. Wilkes and my own are almost identical, or, I should say, parallel.

"Parallel," the old gentleman continued, in measured tones, relapsing somewhat into the old-fashioned, ponderous manner of speech — "parallel in a certain sense. In a certain sense, not parallel. Mr. Wilkes, in his unfortunate embarrassment, has nothing, so far as I can perceive, for which to blame himself. I, on the other hand, was wholly to blame for the misunderstanding which separated Ruth and me.

"She had many admirers, of whom I was one — certainly not the least devoted. We had known each other from childhood. She admitted me to her friendship and confidence to a greater extent, perhaps, than she did any other of her admirers. Still, she never gave any sign that she really cared for me in the way

that I desired, and one night I returned to my rooms from an entertainment at which she had made me furiously jealous.

"I sat brooding for an hour or more, inflaming my mind with thoughts of Ruth's inconstancy and heartlessness.

"At last I determined to write to her, to tell her that my heart, my life, were at her disposal, that I was content to wait for years, if need be, but that I must have some kind of an answer within twenty-four hours, or that thereafter we should meet as strangers.

"I carried out my resolution. I went to my writing-table and took up a sheet of paper. In those days, gentlemen, we wrote on large letter-sheets, of rough white or blue linen-paper, which we then folded and fastened with sealing-wax or wafers, writing the address upon the outside of the letter itself. Envelopes were only just coming into fashion.

"It occurred to me that I had a small sample of choice French notepaper, then something new, with envelopes to match, imported by a friend and given to me as a curiosity. It was like satin in finish and of a beautiful, delicate tint. There were only two sheets of the paper and two envelopes, enclosed in the original box, a tasteful Parisian affair, tied with gilt cord.

"On one of the two sheets I penned my letter, which I read carefully over, and then, as though fearful lest even the angels in heaven should look down and gaze upon the message sacred to *her* eyes, I turned it face downward on my desk, while for a few moments I leaned back in my chair and smoked, in dreamy reverie.

"Then I enclosed my letter in one of the envelopes, replacing the other sheet carefully in the box with its envelope. As I tied it up with the golden cord, I said to myself:

"'If Ruth accepts me, then the first note that I write to her, if ever we should be separated for a day after our marriage, shall be written upon this sheet. But if she does not accept me, it shall remain hidden here till I die.'

"Sir," continued Mr. Sinclair, in the same well-modulated, measured tone, "Ruth never answered me. I met her a few days after writing, and she would have spoken to me, but I would not respond — I had said in my letter that we must be strangers. We have lived here in the same city ever since, and met many times — always as strangers. Though she did not accept me she

did not marry any one else. And I never knew the reason till to-night."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, and the reason was — she never received my letter, for, idiot that I was, I never sent it!"

"Never sent it!" said Wilkes and I almost in a breath, "how was that?"

"I will explain," said the old gentleman, with dignity. "It was fifty years ago, this very day, that I wrote that letter, and as I sat to-night in the same room, thinking over the old times, I half resolved to write to Ruth once more before I died. Fifty years! I thought. We might have been celebrating our golden wedding, but instead I was standing over the grave of golden hopes, buried under the ashes of fifty joyless years! Yes, I would write to her once more.

"I took out the old, faded, tawdry box from its secret drawer in my writing-table, but, as with trembling fingers I untied the tarnished cord, there fluttered out no empty sheet — there fell upon my desk the very letter I wrote to Ruth fifty years ago to-day! I wrote that letter and never posted it. Instead, I had folded the blank sheet, enclosed it in the envelope, and mailed *that!*

"When she received that blank sheet of paper she must have wondered what it could possibly mean, but when I would not speak to her she probably thought, 'Ah, he meant it was all he had to say!'"

As Mr. Sinclair concluded he handed me the letter. It was brief, manly and respectful, and written in a beautifully neat hand.

I knew not what to say as he resumed, in a hesitating, embarrassed manner, "Do you think it is too late? Don't you think we might make it up — Ruth and I — and be happy together for the short time that remains to us?"

"Do I know the lady, Mr. Sinclair?" I enquired, at length.

"Miss Ford," he answered simply.

I knew Miss Ford. A dear old maiden lady, who was always at the head of all kindly works, and spent her time and her wealth in going about doing good wherever good might be done. A sweet-faced maiden lady, with old-fashioned curls, in which the

glossy black still lingered, and with a kindly voice and a gentle manner that soothed the sick and cheered the fallen.

"Don't you think we might make it up — Ruth and I?"

The question was still in my ears, and I was pondering it over, and wondering what possible answer I could give to the old gentleman's singular and embarrassing query, when, to my great relief, further confidential conversation was prevented by the entrance of a noisy party, and Mr. Sinclair slipped away, with a courteous expression of hope that we two should continue our conversation on the following evening.

The next night I visited the club chimney-corner again, and as I approached old Mr. Sinclair I heard Dr. Barry saying to the little group assembled there:

"I've just come from a strange call. Miss Ford is dead. Died suddenly an hour ago. No pain. Heart failure. Just left there."

As the doctor made this announcement, I heard Mr. Sinclair say softly:

"Ruth!"

I looked intently at him and saw him leaning back in his chair, gazing at the ceiling, a gentle smile upon his face. Apparently he was talking to himself and had not heard what the doctor said.

I made a sign to Barry, and he continued in a lower tone, relating as a peculiar circumstance that Miss Ford, when found, had in her lap an envelope bearing a postmark of fifty years ago, while beside it was an apparently blank sheet of paper. On close examination he had found, written in a corner in a neat feminine hand, the words "Richard's letter."

I took the doctor aside and whispered, "Was the paper like this?"

"A twin sheet!" he answered, as I passed him Mr. Sinclair's letter, which I had been unable to return the night before.

I put my finger to my lip and pointed over my shoulder.

Barry looked in the direction of the old gentleman and immediately exclaimed:

"Hello! What's this?"

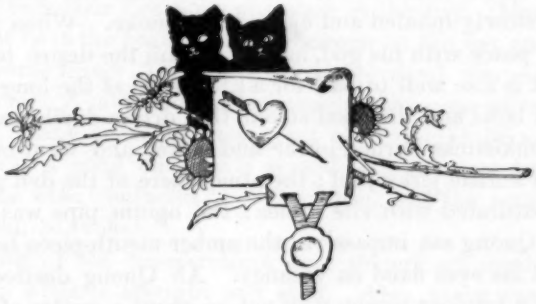
Striding past me he halted in front of Mr. Sinclair.

"The old gentleman is dead!" he said quietly.

He was right. Old Sinclair had heard the news of Miss Ford's death, uttered that one word, "Ruth," and then died — as she had died — of heart failure, and sitting in his chair before the fire.

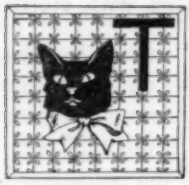
His question was answered without my aid — speedily and satisfactorily. They had made it up now — Ruth and he. He had gone to meet her, it may be, as she had known him long ago, not frail and feeble as he had appeared to us, but gifted with eternal youth.

Yes, they had made it up — Ruth and he.



The Temptation of Ah Quong.*

BY PHILIP FRANCIS.



HE atmosphere of the den was stifling. The burning punk-sticks gave forth an evil odor, and the tinseled, ugly joss on the shelf grinned hideously through the smoke, climbing up in crooked, snaky curves. When a man desires to meditate calmly it is good to be at peace with his god. Hence the liberal smoke with which Ah Quong was titillating the nostrils of divinity. Squatted upon his hams, Ah Quong gazed stolidly upon the face of the joss. The wavering smoke gave an odd semblance of life to the distorted countenance, and to Ah Quong it seemed that the god smiled upon him. This was gratifying. The pious one contentedly rolled a pill of opium, cooked it in the flame of the little lamp, filled the thick-stemmed pipe and slowly inhaled and ejected the smoke. When a man has made his peace with his god, having in him the desire to meditate calmly, it is also well to pull for a little time at the long pipe with the small bowl and the good smoke that drives devils away.

The punk-sticks burned lower and lower and went out, one by one, with a little jerky puff; the atmosphere of the den grew more stifling, saturated with vile fumes; the opium pipe was cold, but still Ah Quong sat impassive, the amber mouth-piece between his teeth and his eyes fixed on vacancy. Ah Quong desired to kill a man, and a prudent person does not go about a matter of this kind without much thinking. It is not the killing only — one must also consider the escape and the baffling of the white policemen devils — uncles of a mule and grandsons of a pig!

Furthermore, there are killings and killings. If it be a laborer, coming in from the harvest of grapes in the vineyards of the country, or from the hop-picking, with gold in his blouse, or a gambler shuffling homeward after a lucky night with the Bowl and

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the Brass Fish, the white police devils make but little fuss. "Only a damned pigtail," they say, in their barbarian speech. "Send for the dead wagon and the coroner." An officer comes and men with him and there is much useless talk. Then the dead one is buried and the white police devils go their way and forget. It was even so with Fook Chow, the fan-tan player. Ah Quong had waited for him where the blind alley comes into the street near the Pipe Mender's stand, in the black dark. One blow was enough, and the fan-tan player was fat picking. The god had had his share, too, having been favorable to the enterprise. Ah Quong never forgot that piety is good in one of his profession.

But to kill a man of importance, now — that is to stir up the policemen devils and make them go about like men mad. There was that Lee Sing — the police devils made much trouble and the danger was great — and he was but a tea-merchant. Ah Quong remembered that he had been thrust into jail and that it would have gone hard with him if seven of his tong had not sworn before the judge devil that he was with them in the boats of the fishermen at the very hour Lee Sing was slain in the city. Manifestly, he could not be in the boats of the fishermen on the bay and in the city at the same time. Therefore, the judge devil was compelled to release him. A lawyer devil had taught the seven what to say, repeating it many times to them, that there might be no error. The trick was a good one, but a second time it might fail. For what says the wise Confucius? "The wheel that the water turns too often shall be broken."

The killing of the tea-merchant, too, though so troublesome, had not been without thought and skill. Also, there was humor in it. The tea-merchant was so round and fat and there was such a terror in his face when Ah Quong took him by the queue suddenly and jerked back the head to stretch the throat for the blow. Right through the windpipe the knife went and the fat tea-merchant made such funny sounds in his throat as he rolled over on the floor. One heard sounds much like those made by the tea-merchant when water runs, chug, chug, chug, from a jug turned upside down. At the Table of the Ten, in the inner council-room of the Bow Leong Tong, Ah Quong had rehearsed this scene merrily, and there was much laughter. From that time, too, he

had been a man of mark in his tong and held in honor. When Ah Quong recalled this fact, he became troubled in spirit again, and his mind wavered like a dragon-kite which an unskilful boy flies against a strong wind. For the killing which Ah Quong meditated would bring him no increase of honor among his tong. On the contrary, it would make him an outcast and accursed. His seat at the Table of the Ten would be covered with the blood-colored cloth, to be removed by his slayer. All the gold and all the maidens with little feet housed in the four walls of the Forbidden City would not have tempted Ah Quong to lose caste with his tong. But a more powerful temptation than gold or maidens with little feet dragged him toward shame and peril. Now the manner of the temptation was this:

There had come to Ah Quong by the steamer mail from Hong Kong a writing to make him know that his father required much money of him in haste. The venerable Wang, being an old gentleman prone to ease and good living, had pledged himself and his wife and his two daughters for the loan of a considerable sum to a Keeper of the White Tower. This he had done trusting to luck partly, but chiefly relying upon the piety of his son, whom the old gentleman pictured as amassing gold in the land of the rich barbarian pigs. The debt was due and the White Tower Keeper was clamoring for payment, threatening else to take the venerable Wang and his wife and his daughters into slavery — which he was the more likely to do since the youngest daughter was exceeding fair and would sell in certain quarters for double the debt. Therefore the venerable Wang required of his son Ah Quong the immediate forwarding of cash to the amount of six hundred dollars, reckoned in the barbarians' money.

It did not occur to Ah Quong to doubt that he must come by the money for his father's needs. Absolute obedience and devotion to parents is the one supreme, all-powerful sentiment in the Chinese breast. But Ah Quong was an inveterate gambler. His sleeves were stuffed with lottery tickets each day and the Bowl and Fish held him fascinated each night. His possessions, all told, would not realize twenty dollars. Therefore, when he had folded the writing and bowed himself before it, he tucked it carefully in his sleeve and walked forth to meditate upon ways and

means. To him, in this frame of mind, came the Principal Devil and led him to a certain dead wall and showed him a proclamation thereon posted. And when Ah Quong had read the proclamation, the Principal Devil departed, for he knew that his part of the job was done.

Now, the proclamation was an offer of one thousand dollars to be paid by the See Yup society to any one who should kill, within the space of thirty days, one Wong Tan Foo, Vice-Consul of the Imperial Government and the son of a swine, unjust, detestable, and so on through the catalogue of Celestial vituperation, which is not short. That there may be a clear understanding of the temptation of Ah Quong, it is necessary here to set down the circumstances which led up to the daring action of the See Yup society in putting a price on the head of the representative of His Sacred Majesty, the Continuation of Splendor, Son of Heaven, etc., etc.

The Sam Yup society, an exclusive body, composed for the most part of the richer tradesmen and merchants, had quarreled with the See Yup society, a body more numerous than exclusive. The quarrel developed into a bitter feud. Each society turned loose a tong or two of highbinders and, for a time, were content to have a throat cut now and then, as occasion offered itself. But having the most throats to be cut and the shortest purse wherewith to hire throat-cutters, the See Yups began to feel worsted in the skirmishing. Therefore, they resolved on a decisive blow and put a boycott on the stores and shops of the Sam Yups and forbade either selling to or buying of a Sam Yup under penalty of death. Made desperate by the threatened ruin of business, the Sam Yups appealed to the Consulate and, by the advice and aid of the Vice-Consul, obtained an order from the Imperial Legation at Washington commanding the See Yups, in the Emperor's name, to raise the boycott. Whereupon there was wrath among the See Yups and presently defiance taking shape in the proclamation of blood-money to which the Principal Devil had guided the footsteps of Ah Quong.

To kill a Vice-Consul is not a thing lightly to be undertaken by a prudent man — and Ah Quong was prudent. Nevertheless, in his present necessity he would have gone about the undertaking

swiftly had there not interposed this obstacle: His tong was affiliated with the Sam Yups and at mortal feud with the See Yups. To earn the See Yups' blood-money was to make himself outcast and accursed of his tong, not to speak of sharpening a dozen knives for his throat. Therefore, long after the prayer-sticks had ceased to smoke, Ah Quong squatted motionless, the mouth-piece of the opium pipe between his teeth and his eyes fixed on vacancy, while from the shelf overhead grinned and leered the painted god.

. . . . . .

There was row enough when the body of Wong Tan Foo, Vice-Consul, was found in the early morning, lying face down in the dirt of the narrow street — a street in which the windows are barred with iron, behind which iron checker-work painted faces leer when the day is old and the night young. Manifestly, the Vice-Consul had no business there, alive or dead. But the way of an eagle in the air and the way of a man in certain contingencies are still past finding out. Certainly the Vice-Consul was there, and very dead he was.

Came first a crowd of curious ones and looked at the Vice-Consul. Came then the police, with clubs drawn, and poked their clubs roughly into blouse-covered bellies, and hustled and pushed the curious ones back, and so made a guard about the dead man. Came later a deputy from the Coroner's office and ordered the body carried to the Consulate, where inquest would be made. Came then, day after day, certain detectives from headquarters and made inquiries, mostly foolish, and had nothing for their pains, and so went their ways. Meantime, all Chinatown knew that a traitor of the Bow Leong Tong had done the Vice-Consul to death, and men waited to see who should present himself to claim the blood-money. The Bow Leong Tong knew the traitor, of course. But it kept its own counsel. More especially in the inner council of the See Yups was there wonderment, mixed with vague fear of wrath to come. There was nothing to fear from the white police devils. A picker of rags would not betray the slayer of his own grandfather to them. Let the barbarians look after their own matters. But the arm of the Emperor is long and reaches across seas. Doubtless they had been too bold, and something would befall them.

The weeks wore away, however, and the See Yups began to breathe easier. The Vice-Consul was long since in China, having made the trip in a gorgeous casket. The police devils had given up the hunt for the murderer as a hopeless job, as it was — for them. The Honorable Ten, much at peace with the world, were discussing these things in the inner council chamber of the See Yups, when the Keeper of the Inner Door obtained admittance and delivered to the First of the Honorable Ten a writing, given into his hands within these five minutes by a trusted one. The First of the Honorable Ten cast his eye over the writing and then looked stupidly at his fellows, without speech. The scroll bore the seal of the Consul and was a copy of an Imperial decree. The something had befallen.

. . . . . .

An hour later the Keeper of the Inner Door again begged speech with the Ten. The presence of the First of the Honorable Ten was urgently demanded in the second chamber. The First of the Honorable Ten went out into the second chamber and presently returned, bringing with him a man — a haggard, wild-eyed, unkempt creature.

"Declare unto the Honorable Ten your errand," commanded the First of the Ten.

"I am Ah Quong, and once I was of the Ten of the Bow Leong Tong," said the stranger, "but these many days have I hid from the vengeance of my tong, and now I come for the price of the life of Wong Tan Foo, whom I slew in the street of the Fair Lilies."

There was silence for a space. Then said one of the Ten: "Thou art a strange messenger on a strange errand. Nevertheless, before thou didst enter the door, knowledge of thee came to us and we know thy words are truth. Thy claim is just, and the price of blood shall be paid thee."

"Pay it, then, that I may go," said Ah Quong. "Between us there is need of no words."

"The money is ready for thee here in this bag, prepared for thee against the hour of thy coming," said the First of the Ten, bringing it forth as he spoke, "but first a word with thee. How camest thou, one of the accursed Bow Leong Tong, and our

enemy, to do this deed in our service? Didst thou sell thyself to shame and swift vengeance for this bag of coin, Ah Quong?"

"I would not make answer, O First of the Ten of a society of pigs, but I will not be utterly shamed among ye swine, whom I hate. Know ye, then, this, that the venerable Wang, my honorable father, was about to be sold into slavery, together with my respected mother and her two daughters. The price of the blood of Wong Tan Foo shall redeem my honorable parents, and as for what happens to me after, I care not. Ye have the tale, children of swine. Give me the blood-money that I may depart quickly."

"Offspring of a sow," exclaimed the enraged First of the Ten, "the blood-money thou shalt have, and safely with it shalt thou go, for such is the law of the tongs. But first shalt thou hear the thing that has befallen thee. Read to this son of a pig the writing in thy hand, learned Lee Wing."

The learned Lee Wing spread before him the writing he held and recited slowly. It was a copy of an edict of the Emperor, that day received at the Chinese Consulate, setting forth that since the illustrious Wong Tan Foo had been murdered in the land of the barbarians, where the ignorant justice of those benighted people could not lay hands on the murderers, therefore it seemed good to the Imperial Majesty to order the relatives of the murderers, being first of kin, to be beheaded, after the manner of the ancient justice of the Kingdom. The decree specifically ordered the decapitation of all the first of kin of one Ah Quong, known to the representative of the Imperial Government in the land of the barbarians to be the actual slayer of the illustrious Wong Tan Foo.

"Thou hast heard," said the First of the Ten. "Thy father, thy mother and thy sisters have passed under the swords of the avengers, because of this slaying of thine. Take thou thy bag of money and go redeem them, if thou canst."

. . . . . .

The old Pipe Mender who sits at the corner of the alley near the fish-market once told a white man whom he trusted how a traitor named Ah Quong, who had slain a notable man to obtain blood-money of a hostile tong, rushed into the assembly of his own tong, flung on the table a bag containing much money, and with a

single stroke cut his throat through to the backbone. The white man had reason to suspect that the Pipe Mender was of the Bow Leong Tong, and was not surprised to hear the suicide cursed as a traitor and a shameless one, whom devils had properly plagued to destruction.

Oddly enough, a fish-merchant with whom the white man was also on terms of confidence, and whom the white man knew to be a notable member of the See Yup society, once spoke of this same Ah Quong. In the opinion of the fish-merchant, he was one of a detestable association of pigs, but whatever wickedness he had done had been atoned for, shortly before his death, by a supremely pious act, which had unfortunately failed of its purpose.

The white man himself has no opinion on the subject.

The Mark Of The Betrayer.*

BY JAMES O. FAGAN.

LOWLY the great ship moved up to her pier, the bright ensign of Britain fluttering at the peak, her few saloon passengers standing at the rail with their hand baggage, eagerly awaiting the placing of the gangplank. Orders were shouted and repeated, whistles screeched, chains clanked, and the creaking of tackle added its dull note to the hum and din attending the docking of the English liner.

In the shadow of the sheds, as garish electric light replaced the fading brightness of a short October afternoon, stood a little group of 'longshoremen, the vanguard of the stevedore's big crew, which, as soon as the passengers and their luggage were ashore, would descend into the cavernous depths of the steamer's hold and toil night and day until it had disgorged its vast bulk of freight and taken in another cargo for a British port.

Stolid and listless stood the brawny toilers now — Celt and Latin, Scandinavian and Hun — a mingling of all the races that have battled with Nature and fought among themselves to bring about this intricate modern civilization. All climes had sent them to these free shores, from Norway's frozen fjords to the burning sands of Africa. Towering above his companions, though bent with labor, stood near the steamer's gangway a stalwart black man, with the torso of a bronze Hercules revealed through the tattered opening of his cotton shirt. His biceps swelled and glistened like copper cordage as the nervous fingers contracted upon the handle of the bale-hook grasped in the powerful hand. In his bloodshot eyes, whose whites gleamed fiercely as he rolled them to and fro, there was a malevolent fire. Though he shivered in his scanty garments in the October breeze, beads of perspiration trickled down from the crisp, iron-gray locks curling closely over

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the massive head. The thick lips, drawn back like those of a tiger, revealed great shining teeth. His gaze was fastened upon something that roused all the ferocity of a savage nature, and it glared from every feature as he moved nearer and nearer to the railing of the steamer's gangplank.

Descending leisurely among the last of the cabin passengers came an erect and dignified man of middle age, whose white moustache and military bearing told a tale to the eye which readily prepared the ear for the title of "major" by which a fellow-passenger addressed him. He answered with a pleasant smile parting the firm lips, a kindly light in the eyes of Saxon blue. He looked in every way the courteous, warm-hearted, Christian soldier.

Nearer the Black man approached the White; fiercer the hatred blazed in the rolling orbs; closer the horny hand clutched the sharp-pointed hook of shiny steel — a fit but fearful weapon with which to tear out a traitorous heart! The bronze figure in tattered shirt and trousers was within two feet of the English officer.

Suddenly a strong hand came down upon the shoulder of the African, whirling him completely around, and, before he could resist or expostulate, his employer, the burly stevedore, had wrested the bale-hook from his grasp and was dragging and pushing him backward into a little office.

"Well, Tom, if you don't quit drinking you'll get hanged one of these days — see if you don't. What the devil possessed you to lay for that English passenger in such a tiger-fashion?" gasped the big stevedore, panting from his exertion. "You're a good steady hand when the liquor's out of you, and I'd hate to fire you, but you can't go on like this!"

The quick eyes of the black man glanced at the closed door, against which the stevedore leaned, and out the little window at the back, through which a carriage rolling away with the English officer could be seen, and his bronze figure relaxed its rigidity. His head drooped dejectedly upon his hairy chest, tears came to the glittering eyes, and he held out his hand, saying:

"Thank you, boss. You've always been good to old Tom, and now you've saved him again from disgrace — disgrace! From death — and worse than death! Truly, it would not be well that

one who has been in the front of battle — has breasted the rifle and the bayonet, armed only with an assegai — should finish his days at the end of a rope, strangled like a bleating sheep. Listen, master, and I will tell you why rage and vengeance blazed in my heart and blinded my eyes and my reason. It will be a full hour before you can begin to unload the ship; let me tell you my story."

Indifferently the stevedore listened at first; then eagerly, and at last with rapt attention as the dusky laborer before him became transfigured in his eyes into a mighty warrior with a terrible past:

"I am a Zulu, but I was a prisoner long enough among the English to learn to speak your language — tame beside the sonorous Sichuana, simple compared with the grammar of my native tongue.

"Years ago, when the white man had but just begun to prowl and dig for gold in the mountains to the north of the Transvaal, before they taught me to drink as I do now, I lived among the beautiful koppies and glens of South Africa, on the banks of a rippling river, sparkling in the sunshine — cool and quiet in the shadows of the silvery poplars.

"In the same kraal lived Looloo and Noona. They were cousins, and alike as two bright berries on a branch in autumn — but Noona was my chosen one. Some day she should build for me a house, like in shape to a bee-hive, made of wattles stretched with grass. It would be one more hut in the kraal — one more sweet South African home; and when the nights grew long and lonesome, the wind whistled through the thorn trees and the dogs whined and moaned at the cold, white moon, Noona would be by my side. Then I would get a few cows and plant some corn, and Noona would hoe it and milk the cows, and by-and-by we would have a great herd of cattle, which is the Kaffir's wealth. So my heart looked into a future all bright and fair; but clouds were coming up, dark and threatening.

"One day I sat smoking on the bank of a warm pool in the river, a favorite bathing place. In the water were some twenty girls at play, curling in and out of the stream like so many human eels. Pretty and graceful were they in their sport, but none so handsome as Looloo and Noona. Catching sight of me on the

bank they came skipping out of the water, their little bronze bodies quivering with laughter and happiness and dripping and sparkling with spray. How well I remember it.

"'Your hair is getting too long, Tonga Umkulu,' cried Noona, seating herself by my side, and, pulling my head down into her lap, she commenced scraping my scalp with a piece of broken bottle. She had about half finished shaving me when the girls in the pool began to scream and cry out, 'Amazwazi! Amazwazi!'

"I understood at once, and crying to Looloo to run I seized Noona in my arms and sprang into the thicket, for dashing up the valley, howling and shouting, came a band of a hundred Zwazi warriors, pursuing the screaming girls. I saw that they belonged to the impi of the Zwazi King himself, and that he had sent them out to capture wives for the royal kraal.

"Panting and dizzy I reached at last a place of safety, for behind the stout stockade of the village the warriors had rallied at our cries of alarm, and we beat back the Amazwazi with much slaughter, but they bore away with them many of our maidens, and Looloo we never saw again.

"But I am glad — glad now with all my heart — that the blossom was plucked in fair fight by the black man, and not stolen and blighted by the white."

The Zulu paused a while in his narrative, passed his hand over his bloodshot eyes as if to recall a thought or banish a painful memory, and then continued:

"It was after I had fought my first great battle that I was to build my home and marry Noona. Before all was ready enemies again entered our country and the warriors again stripped themselves for battle, put on the red paint, and made ready the shield and club and assegai.

"When the hour for parting came, just for a moment was Noona serious, as she looked up into my eyes and wondered what the moisture meant, and then she ran away laughing. Music she was to me, from the tips of her twinkling little toes to the topmost knot of her fantastically dressed hair. Sometimes in the night I can still hear the ripple of her laughter and the jingle of her bangles in the distance as she danced away.

"A long, bitter campaign we fought against our ancient enemies, for many, many moons, before we could return victorious to dwell in peace and tend our herds.

"As we marched back from the final battle and approached the kraal of my fathers, I heard the sound of wailing and lamentation, as though some great one were dead, instead of the joyous greeting that victors should receive, and my heart stood still. A messenger came out towards us. He looked like a stranger, and the warriors instantly surrounded him, but one cried out, 'He has the sign, the come-word and the go-word.' And all who heard shouted, 'He has the sign; let him come, let him go!' The messenger fell at my feet and threw dust upon his head; and I knew that my father, Umsilu, the Induna, the chief and patriarch of his people, was no more.

"Then the messenger ran before me without speaking and took me to the great rock beyond the kraal, where the cattle pass out and down to the meadows. There stood Dingaan, a tall warrior with a square shield of white oxhide and an eagle's plume — he to whom I had committed the care of my promised bride. He stood there with his head turned away, for he could not look me in the face.

"'Dingaan!' I cried. He drew from under his soft cowskin kaross a raven's feather and threw it at my feet. Then he cast himself upon the sod and covered his head with his shield. He feared my wrath and was prepared to die.

"'Dingaan,' I said, 'you have met me with the token of sorrow and the sign of woe. Take me to your hut and I will listen.'

"He led me to his hut and I followed. His youngest wife was the only occupant. She took no notice, for a woman should be silent in her chief's presence, but kept on grinding maize in a stone mortar.

"Dingaan crouched down upon a mat at one side of the fire, and I sat upon a tiger skin on the other. After a while he ventured to raise his eyes to mine and addressed me:

"'O Great Heart,' said he — for so I was called by my comrades — 'Little Noona, the sweetheart who used to fill your pipe with tobacco and your heart with music, who climbed your shoulder to weave your hair into the many patterns dear to the Kaffir,

and cried because it was long like that on the neck of the wildebeest, has gone far away.'

"I started, but sat still and silent, as becomes a prince, a warrior and a Zulu.

"'The white medicine men with the long black coats and tired faces came from the mission away beyond the hills. They had seen Noona, and said her face was like the kiss of the dawn upon the hilltops, and her voice as clear and gladsome as the song of the linka and as sad as the sigh of the night wind through the trees. The chief of the white doctors, he who brought the blankets of many colors for the old men and the dancing fiery medicine for their hearts, said again and again, "Noona must come and live among the white people," and again and again I said, "Never! Do you wish to rob the son of our chief?" And the great doctor with the double eyes and motionless face answered, "No, I will not rob him, my friend, for Noona shall become a Queen among my people and a spirit of peace and friendship among yours." And again I said, "Never!" and bade them begone. But Noona had listened to their poisoned words and was beguiled, and went away.'

"When I listened to this I thought of that day when I had parted from Noona, and had taken her in my arms out to the rocking stone, and there in the beautiful sunshine had rocked her to and fro, to and fro, until, giddy with laughter and rocking, she fell asleep upon my breast. And I arose and spoke to Dingaan:

"'I am weary with the sweat of war, and I must sleep; but when the sun rises above the thorn bush we will start for the city of the beautiful trees, and seek for Noona.'

"For days and nights we ran, as Kaffirs only can, down by the great river Tugela, through the country where lie Majuba Hill and Lang's Nek, and Isandlwhana — the Place of the little Hand — and Rorke's Drift, and other fields of woful memory to the Redcoat, where he has felt the heavy stroke of both Boer and Zulu. Over hills and through kloofs cut by the rushing rain; through swamps and rivers and forests we went, until, after many days, we came at last to the city by the sea.

"I was a prince and a chief among my people, and so I stood, straight as a spear planted in the sand, before the great captain

who lived where the white rocks are covered with guns whose bodies are like the trunks of the giants in the forest, and I said to him, 'Give me back my Noona.' But the great man pretended that he understood me not, and told another man to take me away and search for what I wanted.

"So we walked around among the great houses and fine people, and after a while stopped at the doors of a great temple, filled and crowded. Then my guide said, 'Listen — and look!' At first I could hear only what seemed to be the voice of a child, singing quietly and coaxingly, as Noona used to sing to herself in the days that have gone forever. But as I waited and listened it grew louder and clearer and higher, until it seemed to fill the whole building and sweep out into the air and the darkness. And then I knew that it was my Noona singing — singing as the bird sings with the arrow in its heart!

"There was a hush for a moment, only as long as it takes a linnet to pluck a berry from a bush, and then came a great roar of voices and stamping of feet, and my heart leapt up in affright, and with Dingaan at my back I rushed up in the middle of the room and called my darling by her name. In the twinkling of an eye she was on her knees before me, and all the people crowded about and wondered. But Noona heeded them not and said to me in words they could not understand:

"'Let me return to my people, for I am tired and my heart is full of sorrow, but I have a duty yet to do. Go now, and when the moon shows high over the housetops I will wait for you among the gum trees beyond the great bridge outside the city.'

"When I reached the place with Dingaan we found Noona beside a fire she had made, feeding it continually with the clothing and fine garments the white man had given, till she stood before me decked in her beads and her bracelets, just as she used to be before the shadow of sorrow and death descended. On her breast was a ragged wound, and trickling down her little body were streams of blood. Seizing my knees in her shame and fear and anguish, she called upon me for pardon and pity, and then, pointing to the great white house we could still see shining in the pale moonlight, said:

"'I had many kind white friends, and I thought the kindest of

them all was the white captain who lives in yonder house. He is chief over tens and over hundreds and when he speaks men listen and obey. He came to me like the spirits in my dreams, in white and scarlet and gold, and when he looked at me and spoke kindly and low I trembled and was afraid. Soon the web he cast around me took from me my vision, my strength and my fear, and then his sorcery laid me in the dust.

"'Two days ago I met him and asked him for pity, and he laughed and told me to go home to the trees and the flowers. To-night I crept to his door. His children were laughing and playing and his wife singing within. On his doorstep I threw his presents — his jewels and his trinkets — and with my knife I cut deep into my breast the sign of the Betrayed. My hand I smeared with blood, and in great red lines made upon his door the mark and the stamp of the Betrayer. And my revenge is this — that his gifts and his threshold are sprinkled with my blood. Now let us go home.'

"The cut was deep — oh, so deep — she died before morning and we buried her there, under the gum trees, far away from the home of her people. Then I turned my back upon the city of the white captain, and never again have I beheld his face, until to-day, though often I sought for it in the thick of battle, for I was always among the first when the Zulu King called to arms.

"Now I toil among the docks and slums, and when I am laid away they will point to the spot and say, 'There's the grave of a drunken nigger,' but I am Tonga Umkulu, a chief of the Amazulu, of the pure blood of the race of Chaka, the Lord of many Nations! Never again shall I behold the sunny land of my birth, its bright skies, green trees and meadows, and the beautiful river Intombi, winding in and out among the huts of the village where I was born. Nothing is left me now but memories — memories of black faces, loving and tender, and visions of the pale, smiling, treacherous white man, bearing in one hand gifts, and in the other — a sword!"

The Woman Who Was Not Sorry.*

BY ELLA HIGGINSON.

NANCY DRAPER sat at the breakfast table, slowly drinking her second cup of coffee. Other members of the family had finished breakfasting and gone away. She was enjoying the solitude, when suddenly a loud rap sounded upon the door. She arose at once and opened it.

Mrs. Moon stood outside. Mrs. Moon was Mrs. Draper's nearest neighbor. She had a gray shawl over her head and held the folds together beneath her chin with one hand. With the other she had gathered her skirts up about her spare ankles. Her face was pale with information to be imparted.

"My! *Oh!*" said Mrs. Draper, briefly. "Come in."

Mrs. Moon entered and sank — rather she seemed to melt away — into the nearest chair.

"You look so!" said Mrs. Draper, standing expectantly before her. "Is anybody dead? Oh, you look so! Have a cup o' coffee."

"Nobody's dead," said Mrs. Moon, with deep, hard breathing, "but they're dying."

"My! *Oh!* Have a cup o' coffee. Who is it?"

"A ha'f a cup. I hurried so I can't get my breath. I didn't wait to brush my hair. I expect it looks awful. Such a time as I had a-getting your gate open! A ha'f a cup — *there!* That's oceans. I had —"

"Who is it? Why don't you out with it? Not Mis' Ryan, I hope, with all them little children —"

"No, it ain't Mis' Ryan. One teaspoonful. I'm a-trying to get to drinking my coffee without so much sugar —"

"Oh, my goodness!" cried out Mrs. Draper in a great voice. "It's the minister's wife! I see the minister hisself go a-flying

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down town just as I was a-getting up, an' then I see the doctor go a-flying back past. I might 'a knowed it was a case of sickness. Let's run right up."

She commenced untying her kitchen apron with shaking fingers. "Oh, mercy on us! Oh, mercy on us!" she kept saying over and over.

"No," said Mrs. Moon, unmoved, "it ain't the minister's wife."

Mrs. Draper stood still. Her apron slid noiselessly down to the floor, unseen.

"Well, then," she said, sternly, in a tone that meant something, "who is it?"

"It's that woman at the hospital."

"What woman at what hospital?"

"W'y, forever! Don't you know about that woman at St. Lukeses Hospital?"

"No, I don't know about any woman at St. Lukeses Hospital," said Mrs. Draper, with a little hiss in her voice.

Mrs. Moon settled down into her shawl with an air of satisfaction.

"Well," she said, "there's been a woman there a year, a-dying o' cancer. She's a-dying now in earnest. They say her sufferings are somethin' appalling, but she never utters a groan. *She just lays there an' suffers!* She's been a turrable wicked woman. The Ladies' Aid o' the church take flowers an' books to the hospital every week, but we talked it over an' we concluded to let her be." Mrs. Moon drew her lips together in an expressive way. "We considered that flowers 'u'd just be wasted on that kind of a woman."

"What kind of a woman?" asked Mrs. Draper. Her eyes were large with curiosity. Her breath came and went silently.

"W'y — she had a husband once, an' she up an' run away from him with another man — a man that boarded at their house. They went off an' lived on an island, an' in a year he got killed by a tree a-falling on him. There was only two or three famblies on the island, an' they'd stayed away from her an' wouldn't have anything to do with her. But when the man got killed, they all grouped together an' went an' told her that they'd bury him. They told her in the plainest kind o' English what they thought o'

her, an' what they thought o' him, an' that they wouldn't give him any *Christian* burial — but that they'd dig a grave an' bury him. She was a-kneeling beside him where she'd drug him of herself out from the woods. She had her arms around him, an' her face laid down on his breast, perfectly shameless, an' she listened till they got through. Then she got up an' stood before 'em an' looked at 'em. They said her face was awful. She stretched out her arm and p'inted her finger at 'em.

"'Christian burial!' she says. 'Christian burial! May Christ forgive you for taking his name on your lips! I'd kill myself before I'd let you touch him. Go back where you come from — *an' go quick!*' Well, they went, an' if you'll believe me she dug a grave an' buried him all by herself! . . . An' then she lived there alone. She never spoke to a soul. She never looked at a soul. She lived there five year. That cancer must 'a been eating her up all that time, for when they didn't see her out gathering in wood, they called the county authorities from over here, an' they said she was in an awful condition. She was suffering torture, an' most starved to death besides. About a year before that the women had see that somethin' ailed her; so they sent her a letter an' told her that if she ever took sick an' needed help to hang a white cloth out her window. But there she'd been a-starving, an' there'd never been so much as a *flutter* of a white cloth. They brought her to the hospital an' she's been there ever since. They say they never had anybody in there that suffered such agony, but she never utters a sound. She ain't a bit o' trouble. She never asks for anything. She just lays there an' takes what they give her. They've been a-giving her morphine right along, but she's got so bad now that they just keep a cup o' the mixture on a little table at the head of her bed an' let her give herself a hypodermic whenever she wants to."

There was a long silence. Then Mrs. Draper shuddered and said — "I never hear anything so awful."

"I never did, either. I've hear a good many awful things, too — a-visiting the hospital with the Ladies' Aid so. Well, they say she can't last till midnight."

There was another silence. Both women sat looking at the floor. Occasionally Mrs. Moon glanced furtively at Mrs. Draper.

At last she said, hesitatingly — "I've been a-wondering — " She stopped and cleared up her throat.

"What you say?"

"I say I've been a-wondering — I do' know, though — "

"You've been a-wondering what?"

"I've been a-wondering if we oughtn't to — I do' know, though."

"Well, forever! Oughtn't to *what?*"

"Go to see her — now as she can't last much longer. I do' know 's once 'u'd hurt us any."

Mrs. Draper drew a long breath of purest pleasure.

"Mebbe we'd ought," she said, slowly. Her eyes glistened like a child's at the thought of a picnic. "What would the minister's wife say?"

"I do' know. I don't propose to ask her."

"I bet she wouldn't approve. I bet the minister wouldn't hisself. He goes to the hospital every week, but he's never been a-near her."

"Well, I got a curiosity to go an' talk to her, an' see what answer she'll make. I'm a-going right away. I've just made up my mind. Do you want to go, or don't you?"

"Yes, I'll go," said Mrs. Draper. A splash of nervous red appeared suddenly in her cheeks. "But I hope the minister won't find it out.

"Fiddle on the minister!" said Mrs. Moon, briefly. "I'd see myself a-fretting so about the minister! What are you a-hunting for? A-tearing your machine drawers in an' out like all!"

Mrs. Draper lifted a shamed face.

"W'y — I was a-seeing if I could find that little track on 'The Lost Sinner.' I thought mebbe — "

"She won't be able to read. I'll talk to her. I'm a pretty good hand. You remember that wild Burmister girl? Her parents couldn't do a thing with her! Well, when she got to carrying on so, I went and talked to her. Oh, but I give her a talking to! I told her she'd disgraced her whole fambly by her carryings-on, and had broke her old mother's heart. I told her she was lost forever; an' that if she *turned preacher* an' preached for the rest o' her natural life, she never could atone up for her sins. It had its effect. She cried awful. You could 'a hear her three blocks.

She went down on her knees an' entreated an' entreated me to spare her. But I didn't — not till I got through."

"I hear about it," said Mrs. Draper, admiringly. "She drownded herself that same night, didn't she?"

"Yes, she did," said Mrs. Moon, with pride. "I guess she concluded from the way I talked to her that there wa'n't no hope for her anywhere, so she might as well. . . . I'll run home an' put on my things. I'll be at the gate in just fifteen minutes."

The matron of the hospital, with a feeling of pity for the patient dying woman, endeavored to dissuade the two visitors from their purpose.

"If you were friends of hers, it would be different," she explained, suavely, not daring to offend such good patrons of the hospital.

"We are messengers of Christ," said Mrs. Moon, with a great manner. She lifted her chin high. "We came on an errand of mercy in His Name. If you'll excuse us, we'll have to urge to go in."

So they went in. In a narrow ward that seemed as white and cheerless as Death itself, the woman lay propped with pillows. One could conjecture, from her regular, delicate features and the heavy, dark hair curling about her temples, that she had been a beautiful woman. Now her face was gray and drawn with the awfulness — the prolonged torture — of death.

Her nightdress was unfastened, that she might breathe more freely. Around her neck — that poor neck which had no flesh, only great cords and sinews swollen with suffering — was a slender, worn chain of gold. Attached to it was a tiny locket, which lay upon her sunken breast.

A young nurse was leaving the room, her eyes full of tears.

"We are all attached to her," said the matron. "This young nurse is broken-hearted. Since they brought her here she has not spoken, except to thank us; but sometimes we cannot sleep for remembering the look in her eyes."

The visitors approached the bed. The woman looked at them, and they at her.

"We've come to see you," said Mrs. Moon, sitting in a white-painted chair beside the bed. "We've — hum — hear all your

unfortunate story. We've hear that your last hour has come. We consulted together, an' we concluded it was our plain duty to come an' converse with you, an' offer a word o' prayer. We both agreed that we'd feel condemned — hum — after'ds, if we didn't."

She had spoken slowly and impressively. The woman was quite conscious and understood every word. Her graying eyes were set on Mrs. Moon's face.

"We know just how wicked you've been," continued that lady. "An' how black you've sinned. We ain't a-pretending to say that if you went on a-living we'd come here. You couldn't expect that we would. We've lived according to the teachings o' Christ, an' there ain't no call for us to put ourselves down with them that ain't. . . . But as long 's your time's come, we felt that we'd seem condemned if we didn't come an' ask you to repent up, an' say a word o' prayer."

She paused. A peal of wild, unearthly laughter — as horrible as it was unexpected — had burst suddenly from the dying woman's lips.

"Prayer!" she cried out, between convulsions of pain. "*Prayer!* You talk of prayer — *you!*"

But before the stupefied women could recover, her expression changed completely. She struggled up in bed and rested on one elbow.

"Forgive me," she said. Her words came slowly and painfully. Death set his solemnity on each. "In your way, you meant to be kind to me. . . . Let me now, in my way, be kind to you. It's too late for your religion to do me any good; but maybe mine'll help you in the years to come. You were going to ask me to repent — to be sorry for my sin. What was my sin? My parents persuaded me when I was sixteen to marry a man who treated me like an animal. He let me go cold and hungry; he insulted me; he got drunk and beat me. I bore it ten years. Then I went away with *him*. Sin or no sin, we loved each other as angels love, for a year. You ask me to be sorry for that? Now listen. My religion is to reap as I have sown — *and keep still!* If you are strong enough to sin, be strong enough to bear your punishment. I don't think much of the Christian that is born out of punishment. That is being cowardly. I love God and I love

Christ, and I knew when I went with — him — that I was doing wrong, and that I should be punished. The woman always is punished. So is the man. I have been punished, and I have borne it like a — woman. You would take this one comfort from me in my dying hour. Your religion would have me be sorry; would have me repent; would have me be a coward, to get a little earthly peace.

"Now listen. I'm not sorry. God knows I'm not. He knows *why* I'm not. He knows all about it — and you know nothing. But forevermore you may feel sure of this one thing — a thousand years of the torture I am enduring now could not make me sorry for that one year."

She fell back upon her pillows and lay there, smiling.

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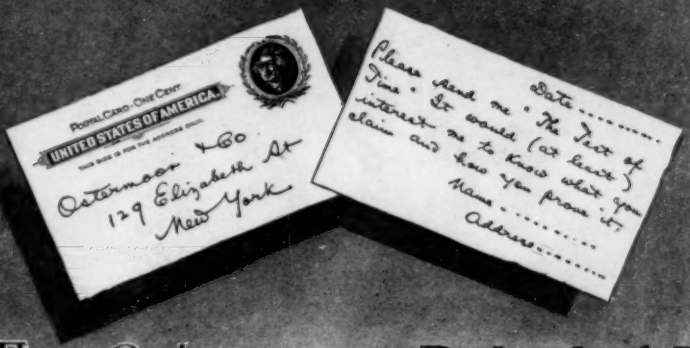
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